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SUBJECT: PRC/SOUTH AFRICA: MBEKI IN CHINA

REF: A. BEIJING 22370
[1](#)B. PRETORIA 4790

Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Beijing's decision to give President Mbeki one of the limited number of state visits following the recent Beijing Summit of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC, Ref A) reflects Beijing's view of South Africa's importance and the "very friendly" relations between the two countries, according to MFA African Department Officer Ma Xiaolin. Mbeki's "cordial" meetings with President Hu Jintao, National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo and Premier Wen Jiabao (the trifecta of top leaders) focused on bilateral issues, with Mbeki courting increased Chinese investment. Mbeki also pitched for close coordination with China when South Africa assumes a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in January, Ma said. South Africa is also pushing for greater support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a South African Embassy contact told us. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff discussed Mbeki's State Visit to China and South Africa's participation in the FOCAC Beijing Summit with MFA African Department Officer Ma Xiaolin, responsible for South Africa, and separately with South African Counsellor Schoeman du Plessis (protect).

Bilateral Relations Sound

[1](#)3. (C) Beijing's decision to give President Mbeki one of the limited number of state visits following the recent Beijing Summit reflects Beijing's view of South Africa's importance and the "very friendly" relations between the two countries, according to Ma. President Mbeki met with President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo in Beijing during a brief State Visit following the recent Beijing Summit, Ma said. The Hu and Wen meetings covered the same substantive ground, while the meeting with Wu was more of a courtesy call. During his meeting with Hu, Mbeki spoke positively about China's presence in Africa and said the African National Congress had much to learn from the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) about how to transition from a revolutionary party to a long-term governing party. Mbeki noted that South Africa seeks more investment from China and expanded bilateral trade, Ma said. Du Plessis separately observed that South Africa wants more

than it is receiving from bilateral economic ties and faces considerable pressure from trade unions on textiles. Mbeki and Chinese leaders did not engage in serious discussion on trade, du Plessis added, noting that neither side tends to raise complaints in diplomatic settings.

RSA Seeks PRC Guidance For UNSC

14. (C) Ma noted that Chinese leaders were prepared to discuss international and regional issues but that Mbeki stuck mainly to bilateral topics. Mbeki did not raise United Nations Security Council expansion or reform but did solicit China's guidance and procedural tips on operating in the Security Council, which South Africa joins as a non-permanent member in January. Mbeki said he wants to ensure South Africa's views are heard. South Africa appreciates PRC support on Cote d'Ivoire, Mbeki added. President Hu said China supports anything that contributes to African stability and prosperity, Ma said. Mbeki noted that South Africa believes China should continue to engage the African Union on regional issues and support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Ma added. Du Plessis separately offered much the same readout as Ma on both the Hu and Wen meetings, adding that Mbeki told his hosts that South Africa will have to pay closer attention to North Korea when South Africa joins the Security Council. Hu agreed to cooperate and coordinate with South Africa on Security Council matters, du Plessis added.

Trade Frictions Glossed Over

15. (C) Premier Wen told Mbeki that China seeks to balance

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bilateral trade with South Africa, according to Ma. Wen said China will try to import more South African products and train more South African professionals. Wen noted that because exports to South Africa are only a fraction of China's global textile exports, the PRC can afford to abide by the voluntary restrictions it agreed to. Wen told Mbeki that Beijing considers this matter resolved, according to Ma.

Ma noted that South Africa brought a fairly large business delegation to Beijing, but only two Ministers (Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry). As Wen recently traveled to South Africa the two sides did not sign any new contracts of note, Ma said, but Mbeki raised concerns about implementation of existing agreements. Du Plessis said that most prominent South African companies and entrepreneurs traveled to China for the Beijing Summit, including Patrice Motsepe, Andile Ngcaba, Reuel Khoza and mining executives from Sasol and Anglo American. The Beijing Summit served to create greater awareness among Chinese State Owned-Enterprises and government agents of Africa's viability for business, du Plessis remarked, but created high expectations on the Africa side that China must now meet.

Few Bilateral Obstacles

16. (C) Speaking more generally about PRC-South Africa relations, Ma said that the Sino-South African strategic partnership reflects the global importance of both countries.

South Africa seeks a larger role in Africa while China needs South Africa as a source of high technology (especially related to mining) and for political support for its objectives in Africa. Trade frictions that have arisen are to be expected given South Africa's outspoken media and strong trade unions, Ma said, noting that free trade agreement negotiations have slowed for the moment due to internal disagreements in South Africa and the fact that the issue is not of vital importance to China given the proportionally low bilateral trade volume. Ma said China believes South Africa's ambitions for a permanent UN Security Council seat could be a potential issue in bilateral

relations, but it is not a present concern.

South Africa Serious About NEPAD

17. (C) Du Plessis said that South Africa generally sees few barriers to improving ties with China aside from the aforementioned trade frictions and UNSC issues. The Chinese Communist Party has good relations with most significant political parties in South Africa. China is another global player, not a threat, and South Africa maintains strong ties with the European Union and the United States. While Beijing and South Africa have not had many opportunities to cooperate on regional security initiatives, du Plessis noted that this may change with South Africa's new non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. South Africa will continue to press for greater Chinese support for NEPAD, du Plessis said, noting that few results have flowed from a memorandum of understanding between the PRC and the NEPAD Secretariat signed by PRC MFA African Department Director General Xu at the NEPAD Summit. South African diplomat Dave Malcomsen, who has spent the past five years working on NEPAD in various capacities, will assume a Minister position in South Africa's Embassy in Beijing in January and will continue to press China for NEPAD support, du Plessis added.

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